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SUBJECT: BURUNDI'S RULING PARTY SETS CONGRESS DATE; WILL  
RADJABU GO?

REF: BUJUMBURA 27

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia Moller for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D.)

¶1. (C) Summary: The CNDD-FDD party Congress is tentatively scheduled for February 6. Although party head Hussein Radjabu originally sought to place one of his allies at the helm of a committee to prepare for the conference, the CNDD-FDD's spokesperson subsequently announced that Radjabu's pick would serve as Vice President. A prominent party leader, a former Radjabu supporter, has privately told Embassy that Radjabu's removal was assured and suggested that the government might subsequently seek to investigate his role in certain decisions. Presidential Political advisor Gabriel Mpozagara told the Ambassador on January 31 that no one should doubt that President Nkurunziza, rather than the president of the CNDD-FDD, wields the power. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The ruling National Council for Defense of Democracy - Front for Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) plans to hold an extraordinary party congress on Tuesday, February 6, in Bujumbura, according to the party's spokesperson. The announcement follows an appeal from Minister of Interior Evariste Ndayishimiye to hold the conference prior to February 10, rather than on February 24 as originally proposed. The party announced on January 30 that it had appointed 25 members, including key party leaders, to serve on a commission to prepare for the session. The embattled head of the party, Hussein Radjabu, reportedly sought to appoint one of his proteges, Martin Mbazumutima, the President's Chief of Staff, as president of the commission; however, on January 31, the party announced that Mbazumutima would instead serve as vice-president, while the party's spokesperson, Evariste Nsabiyumva, would head the group. Other prominent members of the committee include Minister of Communications Ramadhan Karenga, Jean Marie Ngendahayo, husband of the current Minister of Foreign Affairs and himself a former minister, and Mohamed Rukara, a senator who is also the Secretary General of the regional Islamic Conference.

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¶3. (C) Senator Rukara, a former Radjabu ally who has since publicly denounced the party head, told DCM on January 31 that the party would remove Radjabu from his position at the conference. Rukara downplayed his role on the party's planning commission, saying that he is included by virtue of his position as chairperson of the party's Council of Wise Men ("Conseil des Sages.") He added, however, that he

is personally seeking to convince Radjabu not to put his name forward as a candidate for a leadership position in the party.

14. (C) Rukara dismissed speculation that, rather than immediately oust Radjabu, the CNDD-FDD might seek to create a new Vice President position in an effort to limit Radjabu's authority. He asserted that such a scheme would be doomed to failure. Rukara reiterated that party members would elect to remove Radjabu, adding that his departure would centralize power in the Presidency and strengthen the President's position. Asked whether the Government of Burundi might then seek to bring Radjabu to trial, Rukara opined that it would be appropriate to investigate his role in certain matters, such as the sale of the Presidential plane (Ref A) and political killings in Muyinga, and to take appropriate judicial action. Asked further about the potential effect such a trial could have on the country's political climate, Rukara indicated that he did not believe that a trial would be destabilizing.

15. (C) Rukara continued that, because of his outspoken opposition to Radjabu, many in the Muslim community have advised him that his life is in danger. Meeting for a round of golf, Rukara arrived with four heavily armed bodyguards who accompanied him around the links, although at a discreet distance. He explained that the head of the Intelligence Services, General Adolphe Nshimirimana, had assigned the security contingent to protect him, advising that Nshirimana's office believed that individuals in the Islamic community would seek to kill him. Rukara, who is one of the most respected and most well known members of Burundi's Muslim community, characterized himself as a religious moderate who maintained good relations with representatives of the Christian community. He suggested that Radjabu and extremist elements of the Muslim community sought to politicize the faith. Fortunately, said Rukara,

he still enjoys great popularity in the community, which affords him a certain measure of protection.

16. (C) At a luncheon with the Ambassador on January 31, Presidential advisor Gabriel Mpozagara discussed the CNDD-FDD's ongoing leadership rhubarb. Mpozagara told the Ambassador that no one in Burundi should doubt that it is President Nkurunziza, not the president of the CNDD-FDD party, who wields the real power. Nkurunziza enjoys the complete support of the army as the elected leader of the nation, as well as the full support of Burundi's electorate, Mpozagara said. When asked if he thought Radjabu would go quietly if ousted at the February 6 party congress, Mpozagara replied that everyone hoped he would go quietly, but if he didn't, unquestionably, Nkurunziza would prevail.

17. (C) Comment: Although opinion remains divided as to whether the CNDD-FDD will succeed in removing Radjabu, many senior officials are determined that he must go. The balance of power appears to be moving slowly but steadily in the direction of the Presidency. It is likely that many of the discussions behind the scenes now center, not about whether he should leave, but about how to effect his departure in a way which will save some face and minimize the possibility of violent retribution.

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